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Volatile Voters, Short-Term Choices?

An Analysis of the Vote Choice Determinants of Stable and Volatile Voters in Great Britain

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Abstract

The increase of electoral volatility in a large number of established democracies is regularly argued to imply that short-term vote choice determinants are increasingly important. The empirical evidence for the presence of a link between volatility and short-term determinants of the vote is relatively weak, however. Additionally, it is unclear what particular short-term factors (determinants that affect the vote choice shortly before Election Day such as issues, performance evaluations or leaders) would gain weight among dealigned electorates. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the impact of different long- and short-term determinants on the vote choices of stable and volatile voters in Britain. The analyses on three British election panels (1992-1997, 1997-2001 and 2005-2010) indicate that short-term factors are indeed determining the vote of volatile voters to a larger extent than what holds for stable voters. Importantly, the results show that especially issue voting as well as economic evaluations are guiding the choices of vote switchers more strongly than what holds for stable voters.[1]

Keywords: Short-term determinants; Volatility; Voting Behaviour; Great Britain.

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1 Introduction

Over the past decades, the strong linkages between voters and parties have been eroding through a process of dealignment. Scholars have argued that as a consequence of dealignment, the vote choice process of electorates in advanced industrial democracies has changed substantially. On both sides of the Atlantic, the empirical evidence suggests that the earlier dominant forces shaping voting behaviour are gradually losing ground. In the United States, this is reflected in findings of a substantial erosion of partisanship (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002, Dalton, 2007). In the established democracies in Europe, on the other hand, the impact of social cleavages on voting behaviour has been shown to weaken (Best, 2011, Clark and Lipset, 1991, Evans and Tilley, 2011, Franklin et al., 2009). Without the stabilizing impact of these largely stable cues, it should not come as a surprise that an increasing portion of the electorate decides later what party to vote for, splits tickets or changes parties from one election to another (Dalton, 2013).

The finding of the waning of structural factors in voting behaviour has led to speculations on what factors have replaced the impact of partisanship and cleavages on vote choices. It is generally assumed that we should observe a shift from long-term factors of voting behaviour towards short-term determinants. The distinction between both types of vote choice determinants originates in the idea of the funnel of causality that was introduced by the Michigan school scholars and refers to the location of these determinants within the funnel (Campbell et al., 1980, Campbell, 1964). The nature of this distinction in two groups of vote choice factors was summarized by Lewis-Beck et al. (2008, p. 26):

'Social demographic factors such as gender, race, and social class are long term. Two important political predispositions are also considered long term: party identification and political ideology. By contrast, the candidates competing in a campaign and the issues raised in it are considered short-term factors. A citizen's conversations with family and friends about how to vote are also short term. The long-term factors can be seen as providing a baseline from which short-term campaign-specific factors operate.'

The expectation that dealignment is associated with increasingly important short-term determinants is based on a conception of long- and short-term factors operating as if these were communicating vessels; as long-term predispositions are ever less important, voters are expected to attain more weight to short-term factors when deciding how to vote (Dalton, 2013). Scholars have consequently argued that factors closer to the tip of the funnel — determinants that are much more variable — such as issue-positions, aspects of accountability and leader-images should all gain importance within the vote choice process (Costa Lobo, 2006, Schmitt and Wüst, 2006, Walczak et al., 2012). While there is a fierce debate on the alleged decrease of partisanship over time and a rich literature on whether and to what extent cleavages are becoming less important, the question whether other factors are becoming increasingly important has received less attention. As a consequence, there is only scant empirical evidence for the claim that short-term factors are indeed becoming more important. To the extent that there is empirical evidence, furthermore, results are not supportive for the claim that short-term factors are increasingly important (Thomassen, 2005). Apparently, even though increasingly important short-term factors seem a logical consequence of the observed decrease of long-term determinants, this expectation

is not corroborated with respect to the short-term factors regularly investigated.

Short-term factors and their impact on the vote are particularly relevant in light of the observed increase in levels of volatility advanced democracies (Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2015). The increase in volatility has been noted since the late 1970s and students of political science have consequently investigated the characteristics of volatile voters. Furthermore, a rich literature has been published on the causes of volatility, focusing on individual-level determinants as well as on supply side factors (Bartolini and Mair, 1990, Gomez, 2013, Lachat, 2007, Lane and Ersson, 2007, van der Meer et al., 2015). While we hence know quite a bit already on which voters are more likely to change their votes from one election to another, less is known on why they change and what ultimately determines how the volatile vote. The need for such knowledge originates in the fact that electoral volatility is regularly considered a very important aspect of democratic politics. When qualifying the impact of volatility on the quality of democracy, however, it matters not only how much volatility there is (Bischoff, 2013, Mainwaring and Zoco, 2007), but also what factors lead citizens to change their votes. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the importance of different determinants on the vote choices of stable and volatile voters. The short-term factors focused upon here are issues, performance evaluations and leadership traits.

This paper is structured as following. First comes an overview on the literature on changes in voting behaviour, with a focus on the waning of long-term determinants and an alleged increase of short-term factors. This is followed by a presentation of the data used, which are three recent panel studies (1992-1997, 1997-2001 and 2005-2010) that were collected within the framework of the British Election Studies. The panel design of these datasets, covering two elections, allow for a reliable operationalization of stable and volatile voters. After presenting the results of the analyses, the paper ends with some concluding remarks and thoughts on the implications of the findings.

2 From long-term predispositions to short-term factors

Based on their research of vote choices in the American 1952 and 1956 elections, the authors of *the American Voter* have introduced 'the funnel of causality' as a theoretical framework of the vote choice process. The funnel serves as a metaphor for understanding how multiple factors, through a 'converging sequence of causal chains', affect voters' choices (Campbell et al., 1980). While the concept of the funnel has been somewhat forgotten, the time dimension inherent in the funnel has been used and implemented widely in electoral research (Lewis-Beck et al., 2008). The contrast between long-term predispositions on the one hand and short-term factors on the other is regularly invoked in studies of the vote choice (Campbell, 1964). Through this contrast, socio-demographics, but also value orientations and partisanship, factors on the long-term, are opposed to short-term forces such as issue attitudes, performance assessments and candidate evaluations (Costa Lobo, 2006, Schmitt and Wüst, 2006, Thomassen, 2005, Walczak et al., 2012).

Theoretically, long- and short-term determinants are not only distinguished between according to their position within the funnel and therefore the time to Election Day. Long-term

determinants are also more stable than what holds for short-term factors. While most socio-demographic characteristics are stable throughout the lifetime, partisanship as well is assumed to be highly stable. As a consequence, long-term factors are expected to stabilize citizens' vote choices. As clear from the work of Lipset and Rokkan, strong social cleavages can act to stabilise voting behaviour, potentially 'freezing' party systems (Lipset and Rokkan, 1967). In the same vein, partisanship is seen as a stabilizing force. Voters' attachment to a particular party — acquired early on — persists and strongly affects their vote choices, even though this does not rule out voting for another party every now and then (Dalton, 2013).

Short-term factors, such as the evaluations of how parties performed, what issues are considered important or which leaders run for election by contrast can vary from election to election or even fluctuate in the course of a single election campaign. As a result, short-term determinants are likely to be associated to unstable voting behaviour. At an aggregate level, for example, Campbell (1964, p. 748) suggested that *'The greater the total impact of the short-term forces, the greater will be the potential deflection from the 'normal party strength"*. Clearly, short-term factors are considered to have the potential for distorting the impact of long-term predispositions, but the empirical evidence directly linking short-term factors to unstable voting behaviour is virtually absent.

The observation of a process of dealignment in advanced industrial democracies has strengthened scholars' awareness for the distinction between long- and short-term determinants and their impact on the vote. The impact of long-term factors has been argued to be eroding strongly. In Europe, for example, a number of scholars have shown a decline in the impact of social cleavages on vote choices (Clark and Lipset, 1991, Franklin et al., 2009). And even though there is still debate on the continued relevance of factors as class or religion on vote choices (Brooks et al., 2006, Evans and Tilley, 2011, Jansen et al., 2013, Knutsen, 2004, Nieuwbeerta et al., 2000), it is fair to conclude that the impact of socio-demographic factors on voting behaviour has eroded considerably over the last couple of decades (Evans and Tilley, 2012, Franklin et al., 2009, van der Brug, 2010). Furthermore, partisanship has decreased strongly over time (Dalton, 2013, Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002, Nie et al., 1979). This as well should affect the causal chains within the funnel, even though some scholars would refute the claim that a growth of independents implies that partisanship is becoming a weaker predictor of vote choices (Bafumi and Shapiro, 2009).

Besides strengthening scholars' awareness for the distinction between long- and short-term factors, the changes observed have also led scholars to expect short-term factors to becoming increasingly important. As van der Brug (2010, p. 603) has stated with respect to the younger generations for example: *'Since the long-term determinants of the vote are less important for them, it seems plausible that their vote will be more and more decided by short-term considerations, such as issues, evaluations of government performance and candidate evaluations'.* This expectation of more important short-term factors relates to dealigned voters and has previously been investigated by analysing changes in the vote choice over time, by looking at generational differences in vote choice determinants or by contrasting partisans and apartisans. The empirical evidence supporting the claim that dealignment implies more weight for short-term factors is relatively weak, however. In a number of publications in the 1970s for example it

was argued that the decrease of partisanship in the United States was associated with more issue voting (Nie et al., 1979, Pomper, 1972). More recently, Walczak et al. (2012) investigated generational variations in the vote choice determinants of different generations of voters. They found issues to have more explanatory power on the vote choice of younger generations than what holds for older voters, but did not observe a similar relation with respect to the impact of performance evaluations. Similarly, even though he finds partisanship to be decreasing over time, Sanders (2003) does not find economic perceptions to become stronger determinants of the vote in British elections. Kayser and Wlezien (2011), by contrast, show that a decline of partisanship in Europe is associated with an increase in the economic vote. Kosmidis and Xezonakis (2010) have furthermore shown that economic evaluations are more important for late deciding voters. Most scholars investigating the alleged increase of short-term factors have focused on the impact of candidates on the vote choice. A rich literature on a personalization of politics suggests that leaders should become stronger predictors of vote choices as the process of dealignment unfolds (Aarts et al., 2011, Garzia, 2013, McAllister, 2007). The presence of such a pattern of personalization is regularly considered self-evident, but it is important to point out that empirical support for the expectation that dealignment is associated with stronger effects of leaders on the vote is thin or simply non-existent in a number of studies (Curtice and Holmberg, 2005, Gidengil, 2013, Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2013, Karvonen, 2010).

The expectation that the decrease of long-term predispositions is compensated by short-term factors becoming increasingly important factors of the vote is regularly invoked in the literature. The empirical evidence supporting claims that the process of dealignment has resulted in a shift towards the short-term, however, can be labelled mixed at best. One reason for the weak empirical support for this claim could lie in the fact that this should not necessarily hold for all types of short-term factors. Maybe some factors are indeed gaining weight, while the impact of other short-term determinants is not increasing over time. This paper addresses this point by investigating different short-term factors and their impact on the vote choice. Second, short-term factors are not merely affecting the vote closer to Election Day, but are by themseleves affected and influenced by long-term factors as social cleavages or partisanship (Bartels, 2002, Slothuus and de Vreese, 2010, Taber and Lodge, 2006). As a consequence, analyses investigating the impact of long- and short-term determinants of the vote are faced with the methodological problem that long-term predispositions echo though in these voters' short-term evaluations as well, complicating efforts to isolate the effect of short-term determinants in vote choice models. To overcome this methodological issue, in this paper I rely on simulations for assessing the relative importance of different sets of vote choice determinants for stable and volatile voters respectively. Investigating the relative impact of different predictors of the vote will result in insights on what mainly determines the choices of volatile voters – and how their vote choice differs from the choice of stable voters.

As clear from the literature review, the expectation that short-term vote choice determinants are becoming more important originates in claims of weakening long-term effects. Regardless of whether cleavages or partisanship are indeed determining the vote to a lesser extent, it is by now an established fact that the vote is becoming more volatile (Dalton and Wattenberg, 2002, Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2015, Lachat, 2007). Consequently, there is a need to investigate

what is driving these — increasingly dominant — volatile vote choice.

3 Hypothesis

The more variable nature of short-term determinants leads to the expectation that vote switching is associated with more weight for short-term considerations. At an aggregate level, short-term forces have already been associated to a swing vote (Campbell, 1964). The implication of this observation is that attention for short-term factors, e.g., what candidates run in an election, can lead the electorate to deviate from 'the normal vote' (Campbell et al., 1966, Converse, 1961) When focusing on an individual level, this assumed link between instability and short-term factors translates into expecting relatively more weight for short-term factors among swing voters and less weight for short-term determinants among stable voters. The hypothesis that will be tested in this paper is hence that short-term determinants are determining the vote choices of volatile voters more strongly than what holds for stable voters.

4 Data and method

For investigating the question whether short-term factors are more important for voters who switch parties the data from three recent British election panels (1992-1997, 1997-2001 and 2005-2010) are used. The panel format of these datasets, covering multiple elections, allows avoiding the pitfalls of relying on recall questions when operationalizing party switching. Such recall questions on the vote in previous election are regularly found to be underestimating the true amount of vote switching, as respondents either do not remember what party they voted for or simply report to be more consistent than they actually are (van der Eijk and Niemöller, 2008, Waldahl and Aardal, 2000). The panel format, by contrast, allows operationalizing switching and stability by means of independent reports of the vote choice in each of the elections covered separately, which should considerably enhance the reliability of measures of volatility. In terms of the operationalization, not only voters changing parties but also voters switching to or from abstention are treated as volatile voters. Similarly, respondents who consistently abstained from voting are treated as stable voters. This choice is driven by the fact that both types of change contribute to the aggregate-level electoral instability that Campbell linked to short-term forces.

The focus on elections in Great Britain implies that we are analysing voting behaviour in a context affected by patterns of dealignment and a waning impact of social cleavages on the vote (Clarke and Stewart, 1998, Franklin et al., 2009, Särlvik and Crewe, 1983). This process of dealignment is evident from Figure 1, where the decline of British citizens identifying very or fairly strongly with a political party is graphically presented. While 83% of respondents declared to fairly or very strongly identify with a party in the context of the 1964 general elections, this percentage has dropped to below 55% in 2010. Furthermore, election studies in Britain have a tradition of measuring both long- and short-term determinants of the vote, allowing investigating the impact of different types of factors simultaneously (Butler and Stokes, 1969). Additionally, short-term factors are regularly assumed to becoming more important in Britain, which is reflected in a rich literature investigating the (changing) impact of short-term

determinants on voting in British elections (Andersen and Evans, 2003, Clarke et al., 2011, Evans, 2002, Green and Hobolt, 2008, Sanders, 2003). Futhermore, comparative studies in the field of changes in voting behaviour do not portray Great Britain as an exceptional case (Franklin et al., 2009). In terms of trends in net volatility across western Europe, the British electoral context should not be considered an outlier either (Dassonneville and Hooghe, 2015). For these reasons, findings observed in the context of British elections are likely to be generalizable to other advanced democracies as well.

Figure 1 about here

Combining analyses from three different panel studies on British elections ensures that the conclusions are not driven by the idiosyncrasies of one particular election, enhancing the generalizability of the findings. The panel datasets employed are the 1992-1997 BES Panel Study (Heath et al., 1998), the 1997-2001 BES Panel survey (Heath et al., 2002) and the 2005-2010 BES 9 Wave Panel Study (Clarke et al., 2014).[2] While the interview mode for the first two panels was face-to-face, the 2005-2010 panel was conducted online.

Importantly, in this paper the interest lies not in the effect size of particular variables, but in how much different types of determinants contribute to explaining the vote. As referred to above, part of the inconclusiveness of previous research on the impact of short-term factors stems from the fact that different vote choice determinants are highly correlated. Within research on leadership effects, for example, the spuriousness of the relation between leadership traits and the vote or leadership traits and partisanship is regularly cited as an analytical problem (Holmberg and Oscarsson, 2013). For investigating the interplay between long- and short-term determinants of the vote this issue is of foremost importance. Therefore, I employ an analytical strategy that allows investigating the relative strength of different sets of vote choice determinants, sheding light on *how much* long- and short-term determinants respectively contribute to explaining the vote choice of stable and switching voters separately.

First, I estimate standard vote choice models explaining the vote choice in British general elections. The dependent variable of these models is categorical and distinguishes between voting Labour, Conservatives, Liberal Democrats or any other option. To analyse this variable, multinomial logit models are relied on.[3] After estimating these multivariate vote choice models, simulations are run to estimate how many voters would have voted differently if particular sets of variables had zero effect on their vote choice. In order to do so, I closely follow the strategy Blais et al. (2004) use to estimate the gross effect of economic evaluations and issues on the vote in the United States, Great Britain and Canada. Blais et al. (2004) present this approach as the counterpart of the estimation of net effects that was introduced by Alvarez et al. (2000). As a first step, it is estimated how each of the respondents included in the model is predicted to have voted under the full model. The assumption in this step is that the respondent chooses the option with the highest estimated vote probability. Next, the coefficient of a particular set of

[2]The geographical focus is on Great Britain, including Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland, by contrast is not covered by these election panels.

[3]Logit models do impose an Independance of Irrelevant Alternatives (IIA) property. In the context of a vote choice model, different options are close alternatives, potentially violating the IIA property. While multinomial probit models relax this assumption, for practical applications the simpler and easier to estimate logit models are regularly preferred and they tend to provide the same results as probit models (Dow and Endersby, 2004).

predictors, for example economic evaluations, is set to zero before running a new prediction of the vote for all respondents. It is then assessed how many voters would have voted differently if this set of variables indeed had no effect than what was predicted under the full model. To this end, the focus is on shifts in the outcome options for which a respondent is estimated to have the highest probability to vote. This analytical strategy is implemented for stable and volatile voters separately and should give insights on the relative importance of different sets of vote choice determinants for both groups of voters.

Self-evidently, the relative impact of short-term factors cannot be investigated without controlling for the effect of long-term determinants of the vote as well. Therefore, a large number of socio-demographic variables that are regularly linked to party preferences in Britain are controlled for : gender, age, level of education, religious denomination, whether or not a voter is member of a minority (vs. being white), social class and working in the public sector (Clarke et al., 2011, Evans and Andersen, 2005). Additionally, partisanship – the prime factor scholars of dealignment argue to being in decline – as well is controlled for in the models.[4]

Furthermore, the impact of different types of short-term factors is assessed. Issues, economic evaluations and leadership evaluations are taken into account. The impact of issues as short-term factors is quite difficult to be taken into account. The reason therefore is that issue preferences are closely related to and determined by citizens' value orientations. Unlike issues, however, these value orientations are generally considered long-term factors (Aardal and van Wijnen, 2005). Additionally, the variants of issue voting described in the literature are manifold.[5] In this paper, I focus on the impact of issues by including distance variables[6] for issues, which is in line with how e.g., the impact of the economy on the one hand and issues on the other on vote choices is regularly assessed. Economic evaluations are investigated by means of standard items that cover sociotropic and egotropic economic evaluations, both asked retrospectively as well as prospectively (Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2013). Leader effects, finally, are operationalized as a summary score of assessments of the party leaders' leadership traits. Using a combined summary measure of different traits included in an election study instead of a more direct feeling thermometer rating of the party leaders should help avoiding the pitfall of reciprocal causation when investigating leader effects on the vote choice (Bellucci et al., 2015).[7]

[4]Not the strength of partisanship, but merely the party one identifies with is included in the analyses.

[5]Examples are spatial and directional voting, the impact of issue saliency and issue ownership and valence issues. See e.g. the work of Bélanger and Meguid (2008), Green (2007) and Stokes (1963).

[6]For the 1992-1997 panel, the selected issue distance items cover attitudes on (1) taxes versus cutting spending, (2) nationalization versus the privatization of national industries and (3) uniting with the EC versus an independent Britain. For the 1997-2001 panel the selected issue distance items cover attitudes on (1) taxes versus cutting spending, (2) nationalization versus the privatization of national industries and (3) uniting with the EU versus an independent Britain. In the 2005-2010 panel the only available issue distance items were attitudes on (1) cutting taxes versus increasing taxes and (2) reducing crime versus protecting rights. It could be argued that some of these issue items are closely related to measures of the economy. The choice for these particular items, however, is driven by their recurrence in multiple surveys, which enhances the comparability of the analyses on different election surveys. Additionally, a requirement was allowing the operationalization in terms of distance, necessitating the measurment of both respondents' as well as parties' positions on these issues. Furthermore, the aim of this paper is not to test whether issues or the economy are more important, but to assess the relative impact of short- and long-term determinants of the vote. Both these issues as well as economic evaluations can safely be argued to be more short-term.

[7]More information on the construction of the leadership variables can be found in Appendix 1.

5 Main results

Before analysing the determinants of the vote choice, Table 1 sheds light on the extent to which British voters switched parties in recent general elections. About 37% – or more than on on three voters – appears to switch votes from one election to another and this number is fairly constant over time. It can hence be concluded that there is a substantial amount of volatility in British elections, allowing for a reliable analyses of what determines the vote choices of stable as well as volatile voters.

Table 1 about here

Next, the vote choice models are estimated for stable and volatile voters separately. The estimated coefficients are listed in Appendix 2. Looking at the model fit statistics in these tables, not surprisingly indicates that the explanatory power of the models is considerably higher for stable voters than what holds for those who switched. Including a same set of variables, inspired by classical theories of the vote choice, results in a pseudo-R^2 value of about 0.7 for stable voters, but only 0.3 for the volatile. The choices of those who switched their vote are hence considerably less predictable than what holds for respondents reporting stable voting behaviour, offering further evidence that the process of dealignment implies a challenge for traditional theories of voting behaviour.

The estimates of the multivariate vote choice models are subsequently used to calculate the probability that stable and volatile respondents vote Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats or any other option (including abstaining). Following the approach from Blais et al. (2004), of this set of predictions the option with the highest predicted probability is considered the estimated vote choice of a respondent. This prediction, based on the full models, is the baseline to which simulations will be compared. Next, several counterfactual scenarios are tested in which each time another set of vote choice predictors is assumed to not affect the vote choice. This is done for the socio-demographic variables (gender, age, religious denomination, education, social class, employment and ethnicity), party identification, the issue distance variables, the items measuring economic evaluations and for the leadership trait variables. For each counterfactual scenario, a new prediction of the vote choice of all respondents is calculated (once more assuming that the option with the highest probability would be the respondent's preferred option). Comparing the predictions for the baseline model with different counterfactual scenarios gives an estimate of the percentage of respondents that would have voted differently if a particular set of vote choice factors had not affected their vote.

Table 2 lists the gross effect of different vote choice determinants on the vote choice, which offers a summary of the analyses. Given that the estimations are based on separate analyses for stable and volatile voters, we have to be careful when directly comparing the results of both groups. Within a particular column, however, the estimations offer a clear indication of the relative impact of certain set of vote choice factors compared to other predictors of the vote.

The results reported in Table 2 offer strong evidence for the expectation that short-term factors are more important for the volatile than what holds for stable voters. For both issue distances as well as economic evaluations, gross effects are estimated to be larger for volatile voters in each of the election samples. First, issue distances appear to hardly affect the vote

choices of stable voters. Only 3 to 7% of the stable voters are predicted to vote differently if issue distances would not affect their vote choice at all. For the volatile, by contrast, issue distances change the predicted vote of about one on five respondents. In terms of the relative impact, issues have an equal or even stronger effect on the vote choice than party identification among the volatile in the 1997 and 2010 elections. For stable voters, by contrast, issues are clearly affecting the vote less strongly than what holds for partisanship.

Economic evaluations as well appear to affect the vote choices of the volatile more strongly than what holds for respondents with stable voting behaviour, even though the size of the gross effect differs strongly from one election to another. Economic evaluations are estimated to have had the second strongest impact on volatile voters' choices in 1997 and the strongest impact on the vote choices of the volatile in 2001. For the stable, by contrast, economic evaluations are not among the most influential predictors of the vote choice.

Table 2 about here

Results are more mixed with respect to the impact of leadership evaluations on the vote. The size of the leadership effect varies strongly from one election to another. It is by far the most important vote choice determinant of stable and volatile voters alike in the 1997 and 2010 elections, but has a much smaller impact in the 2001 elections. These results indicate that especially the impact of leaders on the vote is largely dependent on the context of one particular election. Sometimes, as holds for the 1997 election, the impact of leaders is huge, and in such a case leaders influence the vote of both stable and volatile voters. At other times, however, the effect of leaders is strongly reduced. As the estimated gross effects in Table 2 indicate, only 3% of the stable voters would have voted differently if leaders did not affect the vote in 2001. For volatile voters, by contrast, even in an election context when leaders are not very salient, about one voter on three is predicted to have voted differently because of leadership effects.[8]

The estimated gross effect of party identification and the socio-demographic variables highlight the continued relevance of long-term predispositions for explaining the vote choice. Self-evidently, partisanship has a strong impact on the vote choices of stable voters, but between 17 and 37% of the volatile voters as well are estimated to have voted differently if partisanship did not affect their choices at all. For the socio-demographic predictors, finally, quite surprisingly it can be observed that these only marginally affect the vote choices of stable voters. If all socio-demographic characteristics would have no effect on their vote, less than 10% of the stable voters would have voted differently in the 1997 or 2001 elections. These characteristics, however, have quite a strong effect on the vote of the volatile. It seems that even though socio-demographic variables do not stabilize vote choices, they still structure how voters eventually choose.

In sum, across the election panels a limited number of factors dominate in explaining the vote choice of stable voters. Their choices seem to be driven mainly by what party they identify with and by how they evaluate the leaders of the main parties. For the volatile, by contrast, the

[8]It has to be noted, however, that 2001 is the election year for which I cannot control for leadership traits for the three main leaders. Consequently, only evaluations of the leaders of Labour and the Conservative Party are included in the 2001 vote choice models.

contributions of different vote choice predictors is more balanced and the importance of issues and economic evaluations in particular is worth noting.

6 Additional specifications

Thus far, the results presented in this paper offer strong indications that short-term factors have more weight determining the vote choice of volatile voters compared to what holds for stable voters. In what follows, I investigate whether these results are robust to changing the specification of the vote choice models.

First, the data of the 1997-2001 British election study panel only allowed the construction of leadership trait measures for two of the three party leaders. Consequently, the estimated impact of leaders on the vote choice reported in Table 2 could be considered an underestimation. As an additional step, therefore, an new set of vote choice models was estimated for this particular election sample. Instead of a leadership traits measure, a single item measuring respondents' assessment of how each of the three party leaders (Blair, Hague and Kennedy) would perform as a prime minister was included. The estimated gross effect of different vote choice factors, based on these additional estimations of the vote choice in the 2001 election, is presented in Table 3. The results indeed point out a somewhat stronger impact of leaders on the vote compared to what the main results indicated. Overall, however, the same conclusions can be drawen from these estimates; it seems that the impact of leaders was more reduced in the 2001 election compared to what holds for the 1997 and 2010 elections. Furthermore, with respect to the impact of leaders on the vote, the difference between stable and volatile voters seems to have been more pronounced in 2001 compared to what held in the 1997 and 2010 British elections, where the vote choice of both groups of voters was found to be determined strongly by leaders.

Table 3 about here

Second, the focus on a directional operationalization of issue voting – which can be considered a dominant theoretical perspective in the literature – implies that only a limited number of issues were included in the vote choice models. It could be claimed that these issues, with a strong focus on economic positions and the EU, cover only a small segment of all issues affecting voters' choices on Election Day. As an additional test, therefore, a number of additional issues were included in each of the vote choice models. Therefore, measures of respondents' positions on a number of issues were included. What issues were included in the vote choice models depends on data availability in each of the panel studies, leading to some variation in the exact model specification in each election year.[9] The gross effects of different sets of vote choice factors, based on these additional estimations, are presented in Table 4. These results offer further evidence strengthening the observation that short-term factors are of more weight in determining the vote choice of volatile voters compared to what holds for voters being stable. The difference between stable and volatile voters is even more pronounced with respect to the

[9]For the 1997 election, positions on crime, the death penalty, being strict on breaking the law, homosexual relations and whether Britain should be a single state. For the 2001 election, positions on NHS spending, on education spending, on the death penalty, on being strict on breaking the law, on abortion and on immigration were included. For the 2010 election, positions on the war in Afghanistan and on the financial crisis were included.

impact of these additional issues than what holds for the issue distances. In both the 1997 as well as the 2001 election, over one on two volatile voters whould have chosen another party if these issues did not affect their vote choice at all. For stable voters, by contrast, the weight of these issues on the vote is much less pronounced and amounts to a gross effect of 5.0 and 8.1 only in the 2001 and 2010 elections respectively.

Table 4 about here

7 Discussion

The process of dealignment is generally assumed to have structurally altered the vote choice process. Importantly, the impact of long-term predispositions is found to be eroding, leading to unstable and hence volatile electoral behaviour. While the weakening of long-term factors is documented relatively well, this does not hold for the expectation that this erosion has given more weight to short-term factors in the vote choice process. This paper aims to address this gap in the literature by investigating the relative weight of different sets of vote choice determinants on the vote choice of stable and volatile voters in Britain.

The empirical tests support the theory, as short-term factors are overall indeed of more importance for those switching their votes from one election to another than what holds for stable voters. Importantly, however, there is substantial variation in terms of the types of short-term factors looked at. The evidence is strongest when issue are looked at and the results also offer some indications of stronger mechanisms of economic voting for the volatile, even though the impact of economic evaluations is comparatively rather weak. For leadership evaluations, finally – the indicator that is probably cited most often as an example of the alleged rise of short-term factors – the evidence is mixed as, with exception of the 2001 election, the vote choices of stable voters as well are strongly affected by how they evaluate party leaders. Volatile voters, hence, are not always different from stable voters with respect to how leadership evaluations determine their vote choice.

The differences between types of short-term factors looked at offers one indication for the weak empirical evidence offered by previous research investigating the increased importance of short-term vote choice determinants. The conclusion therefore should be that not all short-term factors are gaining weight over time, some are, but others are not. And it seems as if leadership characteristics would have to be placed in the latter category. This paper gives another indication for the inconclusiveness of previous work as well; even though issues and economic evaluations seem to be somewhat more important for the volatile than what holds for stable voters, a lot of variation is left unexplained in the models presented. The indicators of model-fit are disappointingly low for the volatile, despite the large number of indicators accounted for. The implication of this observation is that to a considerable extent we simply cannot explain what determines the vote choices of vote switchers. Perhaps even more indicators, not part of the analyses in this paper should be looked at, or maybe indicators that political scientists have not thought of or operationalized in large scale election studies so far. An alternative answer would be that the volatile are just choosing parties almost randomly. Such a conclusion contrasts to previous research on vote switching, however, that indicates that volatility

is strongly ideologically constrained (Dassonneville and Dejaeghere, 2014, van der Meer et al., 2015). Third, the current paper relies on a different analytical strategy than what is often employed in research on vote choice determinants. The focus of the analyses presented here is on the relative importance of different sets of vote choice determinants, and not on differences in the effect size of variables. The tests hence give insights on whether for the equilibrium between long- and short-term factors is different for volatile voters than what holds for stable voters and not on whether the effect of a particular indicator is stronger for one of both groups.

The current study also comes with a number of qualifications, however, that stress the need for further research. First of all, for reasons of parsimony and to avoid multicolinearity between all the variables included in the vote choice models, the impact of a limited number of indicators is investigated. For the impact of issues, for example, only a number of issues are included. Especially for investigating volatility, it might be important to include election-specific issues or control for events that were highly salient in one particular election. Future research should clarify whether effects are similar or perhaps stronger when other issues and types of issue voting are taken into account. Additionally, only economic evaluations are included as indicators of voters' retrospective evaluation of the performance of parties. Given that the impact of economic evaluations is rather small, differences with respect to the evaluation of other policy domains could be of importance as well. As a final limitation, this paper investigates the vote choices of stable and volatile voters in Britain only. Further research should therefore shed light on whether the results presented can be generalised to other democracies affected by dealignment as well.

The findings presented here have important implications for how to interpret the impact of volatility for the functioning of democracy. Most studies on volatility and the characteristics of volatile voters offer reasons for concern about the process of dealignment and increasingly unstable electorates. Volatile voters are regularly found to be lower educated, less interested in and less informed about politics, which leads to uneasiness about the quality of their vote. If scholars are more optimistic about the impact of dealignment for the quality of representative democracy, this optimism originates in the expectation that the vote choices of dealigned voters can be 'truly' informed and well-thought-out. Dalton (2013), for example, contrasts the potential for informed democratic choices to choices based on family tradition and he claims that such habitual or partisan vote did not match democratic ideals. The results presented offer some support for this sense of optimism. Issues and economic evaluations are determining the decisions of the volatile more strongly than what holds for stable voters. Volatility, hence, seems to imply strengthened mechanisms of proximity voting and of accountability — which are thought to be fundamental aspects allowing good representative democracy (Diamond and Morlino, 2005, Przeworski et al., 1999).

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Table 1: Stable and volatile voters in British General Elections (%)

	1992–1997	1997–2001	2005–2010
Stable voters	63.07	61.88	63.45
Volatile voters	36.93	38.12	36.55
N respondents	834	1553	1450

Note: Percentages in BES 1992–1997, 1997–2001 and 2005–2010 panels, based on respondents included in the multivariate analyses. *Sources:* BEP 1992–1997, BEP 1997–2001 and BEP 2005–2010.

Table 2: Estimated impact of different sets of vote choice determinants on vote choice – gross effect (% respondents that would have voted differently if no effect)

	1997		2001		2010	
	Stable	Volatile	Stable	Volatile	Stable	Volatile
Socio-demographics	8.6	25.7	6.0	21.0	18.8	41.7
Party identification	31.6	20.8	43.4	36.8	24.8	17.0
Issue distances	5.3	20.8	3.4	17.4	7.0	24.5
Economic evaluations	15.6	33.4	18.0	52.4	9.8	11.9
Leadership evaluations	71.7	70.1	3.4	29.4	42.8	59.6
N respondents	526	308	961	592	920	530

Note: Percentage of voters that would have voted differently if the effect of a set of variables is set to zero. Percentages obtained by comparing predictions of full models (see Appendix M) with predictions of models were particular sets of variables are not included. In each simulation, the respondent is assumed to vote for the party (0 = other, 1 = labour, 2 = conservative, 3 = liberal democrats) with the highest predicted value. *Sources:* BEP 1992–1997, BEP 1997–2001 and BEP 2005–2010.

Table 3: Estimated impact of different sets of vote choice determinants on vote choice - gross effect (% respondents that would have voted differently if no effect)

	2001	
	Stable	Volatile
Socio-demographics	10.4	34.4
Party identification	43.5	35.0
Issue distances	3.4	19.7
Economic evaluations	10.0	37.7
Leadership evaluations	12.3	42.1
N respondents	1071	660

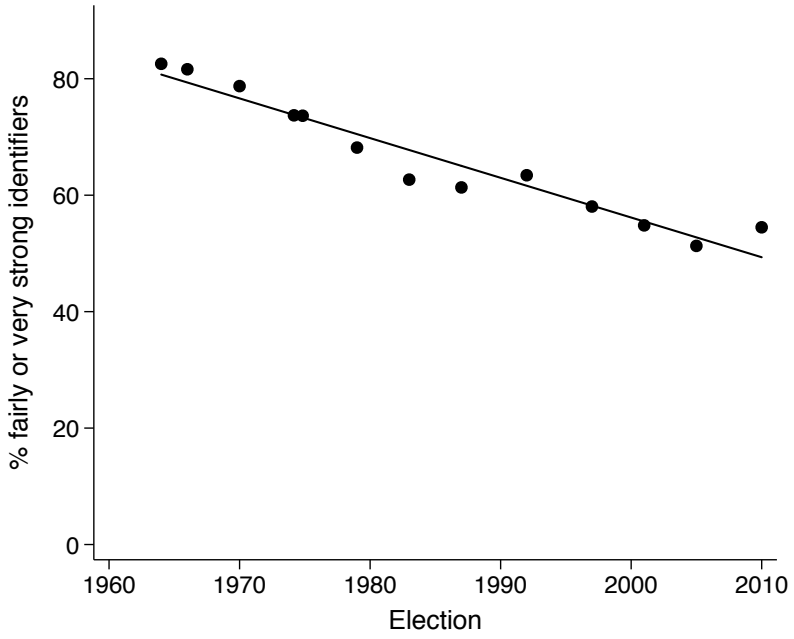
Note: Percentage of voters that would have voted differently if the effect of a set of variables is set to zero. Percentages obtained by comparing predictions of full models (not shown) with predictions of models were particular sets of variables are not included. In each simulation, the respondent is assumed to vote for the party (0 = other, 1 = labour, 2 = conservative, 3 = liberal democrats) with the highest predicted value. *Source:* British Election Panel 1997–2001.

Table 4: Estimated impact of different sets of vote choice determinants on vote choice – gross effect (% respondents that would have voted differently if no effect)

	1997		2001		2010	
	Stable	Volatile	Stable	Volatile	Stable	Volatile
Socio-demographics	8.2	34.5	9.7	31.7	19.5	37.7
Party identification	30.4	21.7	41.5	34.6	24.3	21.2
Issue distances	6.4	29.8	2.8	19.0	7.4	20.6
Other issue positions	17.7	57.9	5.0	45.6	8.1	25.0
Economic evaluations	23.9	55.9	18.2	51.3	10.6	19.0
Leadership evaluations	71.0	67.6	2.5	27.8	39.6	60.1
N respondents	513	299	940	575	857	496

Note: Percentage of voters that would have voted differently if the effect of a set of variables is set to zero. Percentages obtained by comparing predictions of full models (see Appendix M) with predictions of models were particular sets of variables are not included. In each simulation, the respondent is assumed to vote for the party (0 = other, 1 = labour, 2 = conservative, 3 = liberal democrats) with the highest predicted value. *Sources:* BEP 1992–1997, BEP 1997–2001 and BEP 2005–2010.

Figure 1: Strength of party identification in Great Britain, 1964-2010



Note: Presentation of respondents identifying fairly or very strongly with a political party, contrasted to respondents identifying weakly or not identifying with a political party. All data are weighted to correct for the underrepresentation of particular groups in the election survey samples. *Source:* British Election Studies 1964-2010.

Appendix 1. Leadership evaluation measures

1992-1997 panel

Items used:

- x looks after one class
- x is capable of being a strong leader
- x keeps his promises

Scale reliability statistics:

	Eigenvalue	Cronbach's α
Major	1.986	0.742
Blair	1.706	0.582
Ashdown	1.729	0.577

1997-2001 panel

Items used:

- x is capable strong leader
- describe x as decisive
- x keeps his promises
- x listens to reason

Scale reliability statistics:

	Eigenvalue	Cronbach's α
Blair	2.497	0.796
Hague	2.360	0.769

2005-2010 panel

Items used:

- x knows what he is talking about
- x has my interests
- x tells truth

Scale reliability statistics:

	Eigenvalue	Cronbach's α
Brown	2.623	0.929
Cameron	2.558	0.915
Clegg	2.934	0.889

Appendix 2. Full results (explaining the vote choice)

Table 5: Vote choice stable voters 1997

	Lab/others	Cons/others	LibDem/others
	B	B	B
	(s.e.)	(s.e.)	(s.e.)
Socio-demographics			
Female	0.496	1.854*	1.048
	(0.553)	(0.904)	(0.665)
Age	0.034	0.023	0.019
	(0.021)	(0.031)	(0.024)
Religious denomination (ref: Anglican)			
Other	-0.263	-0.150	0.199
	(0.699)	(1.017)	(0.805)
None	-0.748	0.769	-0.180
	(0.679)	(1.045)	(0.793)
Education	0.004	-0.592	0.175
	(0.511)	(0.921)	(0.583)
Social class	0.067	-0.567	-0.203
	(0.218)	(0.338)	(0.257)
Public sector	0.760	0.767	1.100
	(0.599)	(0.937)	(0.698)
Ethnic minority	16.400	15.000	14.570
	(2887.700)	(2887.700)	(2887.700)
Party identification			
Party ID (ref: Labour)			
Conservative	-3.597***	5.106***	-16.260
	(0.994)	(1.367)	(911.600)
Liberal Democrat	-2.854**	1.490	2.543**
	(0.913)	(1.204)	(0.876)
Other	-6.253***	-23.020	-4.344**
	(0.988)	(53970.000)	(1.330)
None	-23.580	0.960	-20.660
	(5891.400)	(1.689)	(14344.300)
Issue distances			
Taxes conservatives	0.005	-0.468*	-0.216
	(0.112)	(0.197)	(0.141)
Taxes labour	0.185	0.210	0.294
	(0.201)	(0.320)	(0.231)
Taxes liberal democrats	-0.188	-0.820*	-0.268
	(0.164)	(0.323)	(0.247)
Privatization conservatives	0.023	-0.171	0.061
	(0.111)	(0.186)	(0.132)
Privatization labour	-0.044	0.158	0.147
	(0.181)	(0.324)	(0.235)
Privatization liberal democrats	0.042	-0.180	-0.220
	(0.185)	(0.306)	(0.221)
EC conservatives	-0.075	0.171	0.186
	(0.093)	(0.162)	(0.117)
EC labour	0.025	-0.107	0.432*

	(0.161)	(0.244)	(0.196)
EC liberal democrats	-0.076	0.449	-0.454*
	(0.172)	(0.263)	(0.220)
Economic evaluations			
Sociotropic retrospective	-0.671	1.116	-0.171
	(0.378)	(0.640)	(0.468)
Sociotropic prospective	-0.151	-0.574	-0.742
	(0.408)	(0.669)	(0.486)
Egotropic retrospective	-0.117	-0.579	0.219
	(0.331)	(0.592)	(0.403)
Egotropic prospective	-0.256	0.643	-0.027
	(0.382)	(0.729)	(0.477)
Leadership evaluations			
Major	-0.627	1.592*	-0.404
	(0.456)	(0.729)	(0.532)
Blair	3.614***	-0.844	0.931
	(1.044)	(1.140)	(1.352)
Ashdown	0.379	-0.019	2.340*
	(0.663)	(1.130)	(1.187)
Constant	-5.356	-2.819	-6.797
	(3.345)	(5.048)	(4.221)
N	526		
pseudo R^2	0.710		

Note: Estimates of multinomial logit model with 1997 vote as the dependent variable.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.
Source: British Election Panel 1992-1997.

Table 6: Vote choice volatile voters 1997

	Lab/others B (s.e.)	Cons/others B (s.e.)	LibDem/others B (s.e.)
Socio-demographics			
Female	0.107	-1.015	0.270
	(0.395)	(0.948)	(0.494)
Age	0.007	0.011	0.021
	(0.015)	(0.034)	(0.019)
Religious denomination (ref: Anglican)			
Other	0.241	-1.871	0.214
	(0.451)	(1.101)	(0.545)
None	-0.004	-0.849	0.349
	(0.468)	(0.937)	(0.587)
Education	0.727	0.774	0.929
	(0.419)	(0.936)	(0.515)
Social class	-0.429**	-0.480	-0.193
	(0.153)	(0.313)	(0.197)
Public sector	-0.411	-0.125	-0.480
	(0.403)	(0.845)	(0.516)
Ethnic minority	17.850	2.424	0.618
	(3429.500)	(5254.100)	(5682.300)
Party identification			
Party ID (ref: Labour)			
Conservative	-0.852	-0.005	1.376*
	(0.554)	(1.000)	(0.672)
Liberal democrat	0.684	-16.100	3.366***
	(0.609)	(1463.500)	(0.703)
Other	-2.755***	-17.400	-0.727
	(0.758)	(2942.500)	(0.979)
None	0.000	-19.230	0.990
	(1.034)	(2954.600)	(1.197)
Issue distances			
Taxes conservatives	0.053	-0.295	0.144
	(0.080)	(0.210)	(0.099)
Taxes labour	0.139	-0.542	0.364
	(0.170)	(0.296)	(0.201)
Taxes liberal democrats	0.073	0.683**	-0.112
	(0.136)	(0.265)	(0.170)
Privatization conservatives	0.174	-0.009	0.190
	(0.090)	(0.200)	(0.109)
Privatization labour	0.236	0.047	0.200
	(0.136)	(0.254)	(0.169)
Privatization liberal democrats	-0.298*	0.033	-0.400*
	(0.130)	(0.255)	(0.177)
EC conservatives	0.048	-0.059	-0.011
	(0.071)	(0.170)	(0.089)
EC labour	-0.222*	0.198	-0.096
	(0.107)	(0.202)	(0.131)
EC liberal democrats	-0.030	-0.036	-0.153

	(0.101)	(0.205)	(0.131)
Economic evaluations			
Sociotropic retrospective	-0.648**	-0.572	-0.717*
	(0.245)	(0.538)	(0.303)
Sociotropic prospective	0.288	-1.447*	-0.220
	(0.306)	(0.664)	(0.368)
Egotropic retrospective	-0.304	0.931	-0.177
	(0.259)	(0.723)	(0.311)
Egotropic prospective	0.112	0.058	0.446
	(0.268)	(0.749)	(0.347)
Leadership evaluations			
Major	-0.696*	0.451	-0.009
	(0.298)	(0.563)	(0.352)
Blair	1.543*	2.324*	0.039
	(0.647)	(1.138)	(0.620)
Ashdown	0.063	-0.099	1.097
	(0.475)	(0.863)	(0.788)
Constant	-1.234	-3.416	-4.395
	(2.633)	(5.177)	(3.374)
N	308		
pseudo R^2	0.364		

Note: Estimates of multinomial logit model with 1997 vote as the dependent variable.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: British Election Panel 1992-1997.

Table 7: Vote choice stable voters 2001

	Lab/others B (s.e.)	Cons/others B (s.e.)	LibDem/others B (s.e.)
Socio-demographics			
Female	0.003	-0.011	-0.886*
	(0.282)	(0.507)	(0.431)
Age	0.027**	0.046*	0.030
	(0.010)	(0.018)	(0.016)
Religious denomination (ref: Anglican)			
Other	0.053	-0.074	-0.615
	(0.368)	(0.580)	(0.502)
None	-0.725*	-0.764	-1.834***
	(0.352)	(0.588)	(0.521)
Education	-0.264	-0.472	0.370
	(0.282)	(0.451)	(0.389)
Social class	-0.178	-0.182	-0.409*
	(0.108)	(0.198)	(0.171)
Public sector	0.020	0.669	0.390
	(0.324)	(0.595)	(0.466)
Ethnic minority	0.192	1.687	-13.560
	(0.749)	(1.156)	(1112.5)
Party identification			
Party ID (ref: Labour)			
Conservative	-2.168***	5.079***	-1.225
	(0.555)	(0.785)	(1.176)
Liberal democrat	-1.452*	0.169	4.432***
	(0.589)	(1.076)	(0.611)
Other	-4.575***	-17.900	-1.689*
	(0.700)	(1090.700)	(0.804)
None	-3.913***	-0.452	-0.621
	(0.801)	(1.092)	(0.793)
Issue distances			
Taxes conservatives	0.149*	0.195	0.115
	(0.062)	(0.134)	(0.090)
Taxes labour	-0.147	-0.314*	0.072
	(0.083)	(0.156)	(0.123)
Taxes liberal democrats	-0.082	0.086	-0.178
	(0.083)	(0.130)	(0.132)
Privatization conservatives	0.079	-0.177	0.126
	(0.062)	(0.116)	(0.093)
Privatization labour	-0.119	-0.046	-0.108
	(0.086)	(0.139)	(0.127)
Privatization liberal democrats	-0.008	-0.026	-0.099
	(0.098)	(0.145)	(0.150)
EU conservatives	0.140*	-0.196	0.160*
	(0.056)	(0.111)	(0.081)
EU labour	-0.022	0.198*	0.108
	(0.058)	(0.088)	(0.104)
EU liberal democrats	0.007	-0.019	-0.204

	(0.031)	(0.038)	(0.127)
Economic evaluations			
Sociotropic retrospective	-0.003	-0.912**	-0.010
	(0.197)	(0.312)	(0.275)
Sociotropic prospective	0.215	-0.263	0.018
	(0.201)	(0.330)	(0.276)
Egotropic retrospective	-0.223	0.205	-0.223
	(0.174)	(0.275)	(0.256)
Egotropic prospective	0.366	-0.051	-0.004
	(0.206)	(0.341)	(0.296)
Leadership evaluations			
Blair	0.405	-0.408	0.451
	(0.240)	(0.353)	(0.359)
Hague	-0.290	0.695*	-0.249
	(0.203)	(0.342)	(0.312)
Constant	-0.591	-0.739	-1.097
	(1.281)	(2.226)	(1.874)
N	961		
pseudo R^2	0.675		

Note: Estimates of multinomial logit model with 2001 vote as the dependent variable.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: British Election Panel 1997-2001.

Table 8: Vote choice volatile voters 2001

	Lab/others B (s.e.)	Cons/others B (s.e.)	LibDem/others B (s.e.)
Socio-demographics			
Female	-0.191	0.120	-0.199
	(0.286)	(0.328)	(0.279)
Age	0.005	0.012	0.0213*
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.010)
Religious denomination (ref: Anglican)			
Other	-0.037	-0.382	-0.378
	(0.342)	(0.374)	(0.347)
None	-0.576	-0.839*	-0.145
	(0.367)	(0.389)	(0.337)
Education	-0.248	0.400	-0.028
	(0.275)	(0.316)	(0.273)
Social class	-0.236*	-0.076	-0.174
	(0.110)	(0.134)	(0.113)
Public sector	0.167	-0.261	0.726*
	(0.319)	(0.398)	(0.301)
Ethnic minority	0.467	-0.733	-1.798
	(0.786)	(1.420)	(1.356)
Party identification			
Party ID (ref: Labour)			
Conservative	-2.318***	2.339***	0.309
	(0.599)	(0.526)	(0.421)
Liberal democrat	-1.168*	0.901	1.945***
	(0.524)	(0.688)	(0.359)
Other	-1.916**	0.420	-2.802**
	(0.583)	(0.690)	(1.062)
None	-1.941**	1.118	0.183
	(0.673)	(0.632)	(0.462)
Issue distances			
Taxes conservatives	-0.045	-0.084	-0.042
	(0.061)	(0.089)	(0.063)
Taxes labour	-0.096	0.108	-0.023
	(0.087)	(0.093)	(0.078)
Taxes liberal democrats	-0.081	-0.065	-0.098
	(0.084)	(0.099)	(0.087)
Privatization conservatives	-0.066	-0.003	0.111
	(0.059)	(0.084)	(0.062)
Privatization labour	-0.124	-0.141	0.035
	(0.083)	(0.092)	(0.072)
Privatization liberal democrats	0.193*	-0.088	-0.163
	(0.096)	(0.102)	(0.090)
EU conservatives	0.047	-0.068	0.092
	(0.057)	(0.072)	(0.057)
EU labour	0.051	0.120*	0.107
	(0.077)	(0.058)	(0.067)
EU liberal democrats	-0.138	-0.014	-0.238**

	(0.086)	(0.035)	(0.081)
Economic evaluations			
Sociotropic retrospective	-0.041	-0.094	-0.193
	(0.198)	(0.189)	(0.176)
Sociotropic propsective	0.102	0.260	-0.075
	(0.212)	(0.224)	(0.203)
Egotropic retrospective	0.394*	-0.339	-0.051
	(0.169)	(0.182)	(0.162)
Egotropic prospective	-0.121	-0.502*	-0.257
	(0.202)	(0.209)	(0.188)
Leadership evaluations			
Blair	1.001***	-0.171	0.075
	(0.252)	(0.249)	(0.217)
Hague	-0.150	0.466*	-0.065
	(0.205)	(0.230)	(0.200)
Constant	-0.909	-0.793	0.383
	(1.290)	(1.466)	(1.264)
N	592		
pseudo R^2	0.317		

Note: Estimates of multinomial logit model with 2001 vote as the dependent variable.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: British Election Panel 1997-2001.

Table 9: Vote choice stable voters 2010

	Lab/others B (s.e.)	Cons/others B (s.e.)	LibDem/others B (s.e.)
Socio-demographics			
Female	-0.091	0.664	0.107
	(0.438)	(0.477)	(0.386)
Age	0.013	-0.009	-0.010
	(0.017)	(0.019)	(0.014)
Religious denomination (ref: Anglican)			
Other	-0.886	-1.085	-1.199*
	(0.667)	(0.698)	(0.608)
None	-0.617	-1.881**	-0.658
	(0.574)	(0.605)	(0.522)
Education	0.628	-0.469	0.192
	(0.371)	(0.401)	(0.322)
Social class	0.088	-0.288*	-0.138
	(0.131)	(0.139)	(0.118)
Public sector	0.849	0.434	0.953*
	(0.457)	(0.497)	(0.406)
Ethnic minority	-0.186	0.032	0.434
	(1.503)	(1.310)	(1.284)
Party identification			
Party ID (ref: Labour)			
Conservative	-1.165	3.608***	-0.474
	(0.963)	(0.817)	(0.774)
Liberal democrat	-1.377	0.046	2.463***
	(0.928)	(1.187)	(0.724)
Other	-4.708***	-1.323	-1.864***
	(0.778)	(0.777)	(0.542)
None	-2.703***	1.045	0.258
	(0.621)	(0.743)	(0.509)
Issue distances			
Taxes labour	-0.308	0.359**	0.063
	(0.170)	(0.122)	(0.113)
Taxes conservatives	0.075	-0.617***	-0.055
	(0.109)	(0.177)	(0.096)
Taxes liberal democrats	-0.006	0.109	0.089
	(0.149)	(0.120)	(0.114)
Crime labour	-0.270**	-0.113	-0.065
	(0.100)	(0.081)	(0.073)
Crime conservatives	0.116	-0.039	0.055
	(0.102)	(0.124)	(0.090)
Crime liberal democrats	0.161	0.488***	-0.053
	(0.102)	(0.110)	(0.089)
Economic evaluations			
Egotropic retrospective	-0.162	0.012	0.474
	(0.299)	(0.319)	(0.247)
Egotropic prospective	-0.718*	-0.120	-0.923**
	(0.329)	(0.356)	(0.287)

Sociotropic retrospective	0.393	-0.297	0.162
	(0.249)	(0.295)	(0.228)
Sociotropic prospective	0.482	-0.597	0.294
	(0.295)	(0.314)	(0.254)
Leadership evaluations			
Brown	0.685***	0.005	-0.015
	(0.119)	(0.112)	(0.091)
Cameron	-0.058	0.934***	-0.121
	(0.116)	(0.160)	(0.100)
Clegg	-0.150	-0.311	0.575***
	(0.139)	(0.161)	(0.122)
Constant	-1.725	0.124	-0.643
	(1.624)	(1.704)	(1.392)
N	920		
pseudo R^2	0.721		

Note: Estimates of multinomial logit model with 2010 vote as the dependent variable.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: Data: British Election Panel 2005-2010.

Table 10: Vote choice volatile voters 2010

	Lab/others B (s.e.)	Cons/others B (s.e.)	LibDem/others B (s.e.)
Socio-demographics			
Female	0.075	0.482	-0.372
	(0.356)	(0.296)	(0.296)
Age	-0.022	-0.017	-0.030*
	(0.015)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Religious denomination (ref: Anglican)			
Other	0.364	-0.182	-0.909*
	(0.513)	(0.407)	(0.431)
None	-0.482	-0.428	-0.662
	(0.447)	(0.342)	(0.345)
Education	-0.468	-0.541*	-0.358
	(0.296)	(0.243)	(0.247)
Social class	-0.178	-0.156	-0.206*
	(0.111)	(0.086)	(0.089)
Public sector	0.500	0.237	0.713*
	(0.372)	(0.308)	(0.306)
Ethnic minority	-0.025	0.676	-0.501
	(1.247)	(0.883)	(1.275)
Party identification			
Party ID (ref: Labour)			
Conservative	-0.704	0.582	-0.343
	(0.697)	(0.449)	(0.533)
Liberal democrat	-1.812*	-0.104	-0.054
	(0.841)	(0.572)	(0.480)
Other	-1.702***	-1.421**	-1.847***
	(0.508)	(0.464)	(0.451)
None	-0.305	0.362	0.083
	(0.483)	(0.426)	(0.408)
Issue distances			
Taxes labour	0.095	0.057	0.014
	(0.122)	(0.076)	(0.098)
Taxes conservatives	0.099	-0.233*	-0.089
	(0.092)	(0.102)	(0.083)
Taxes liberal democrats	-0.116	0.021	-0.124
	(0.132)	(0.084)	(0.108)
Crime labour	-0.272**	0.093	0.004
	(0.085)	(0.051)	(0.060)
Crime conservatives	0.140	-0.139	-0.085
	(0.082)	(0.078)	(0.072)
Crime liberal democrats	-0.056	-0.030	-0.220**
	(0.080)	(0.057)	(0.071)
Economic evaluations			
Egotropic retrospective	-0.209	0.095	-0.200
	(0.211)	(0.187)	(0.185)
Egotropic prospective	0.585*	0.091	-0.171
	(0.253)	(0.222)	(0.216)

Sociotropic retrospective	-0.260	-0.222	-0.075
	(0.204)	(0.181)	(0.171)
Sociotropic prospective	-0.086	0.163	0.364
	(0.241)	(0.182)	(0.190)
Leadership evaluations			
Brown	0.410***	0.036	0.104
	(0.094)	(0.071)	(0.074)
Cameron	-0.048	0.412***	-0.173*
	(0.096)	(0.085)	(0.080)
Clegg	-0.178	-0.112	0.313***
	(0.107)	(0.090)	(0.091)
Constant	1.223	-0.256	2.862*
	(1.354)	(1.149)	(1.141)
N	530		
pseudo R^2	0.313		

Note: Estimates of multinomial logit model with 2010 vote as the dependent variable.
Standard errors in parentheses * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
Source: British Election Panel 2005-2010.